

December 17, 2009 letter to which I referred.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,

Washington, DC, December 17, 2009.

Mr. ABHISIT VEJAJIVA,  
Prime Minister, Kingdom of Thailand, Wisconsin Ave, N.W., Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRIME MINISTER, We are writing to express our concern regarding reports of a possible repatriation to Laos of Lao Ilmong from the Huay Nam Khao camp and Nong Khai detention center in Thailand. While we recognize that the Kingdom of Thailand is burdened by the large number of refugees it hosts on its territory, we encourage you to not take steps to repatriate any individuals to Laos at this time. Thailand is a strong ally of the U.S., and the cooperation between our governments, including a history of working together on Laotian and Burmese refugee issues, is greatly valued.

We understand that your government has conducted screenings in the Phetchabun camp in fluay Nam Khao to identify and separate refugees meriting protection from those migrating for primarily economic reasons. We remain concerned, however, regarding the lack of transparency in this screening process, and the absence of a civilian entity to lead it. In July of this year, a group of Senators sent a letter to General Songkitti Jaggabatarata requesting more information about the criteria and methods used in screening Laotian Hmong in the Phetchabun camp, but a response to this inquiry has not yet been received.

We acknowledge the difficulty that this issue has posed for both your country as well as the inhabitants of the camps. However, we believe that the lack of transparency in the screening and repatriation process only exacerbates these difficulties and heightens international concern regarding these populations. A process that adheres to the core tenets of the refugee convention, and is conducted by an independent third party organization, could resolve much of this concern by helping to ensure that the Lao Hmong are able to provide a full and accurate account that can serve as the basis for an appropriate status determination.

Before repatriating any individuals to Laos, we strongly urge your government to work with an independent third-party organization to conduct a transparent screening process consistent with international standards. Once such a process is in place, we hope that any Hmong determined to have refugee status will be provided opportunities for third country resettlement. This includes the individuals at the Nong Khai center, who have already been screened by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. For those who are not judged to require protection, we encourage you to work with international organizations and the governments of the U.S. and Laos to establish a repatriation process that includes effective third party monitoring.

We also understand that Assistant Secretary of State Eric Schwartz will be visiting Thailand in the very near future. We hope that the U.S. and Thailand can work closely to find a solution that alleviates the burden of this situation on Thailand, as well as the concerns about the repatriation of those in need of protection, and we would be happy to consult with you on this process.

We appreciate your efforts to ensure a transparent process and just resolution to this issue. The Kingdom of Thailand remains a close ally of the United States and we look

forward to working with your government to strengthen this important relationship.

Sincerely,

Russell D. Feingold, United States Senator; Barbara Boxer, United States Senator; Sheldon Whitehouse, United States Senator; Richard G. Lugar, United States Senator; Patrick J. Leahy, United States Senator; Lisa Murkowski, United States Senator; Amy Klobuchar, United States Senator; Mark Begich, United States Senator; Al Franken, United States Senator.

#### TRIBUTE TO LEWIS K. BILLINGS

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, today I express my deep appreciation to a great Utahn and friend, Provo City Mayor Lewis K. Billings, whose tenure as mayor will soon come to an end. It has been my distinct pleasure to work with Mayor Billings over the past 12 years.

Nestled at the base of the Rocky Mountains, Provo was founded by rugged pioneers in 1849 and is one of the oldest cities in the West. Today, Provo is one of largest cities in the State of Utah. Mayor Billings and his beautiful wife Patti are longtime residents of Provo and raised eight wonderful children there.

Mayor Billings was elected Provo City Mayor in November 1997, after completing 3 years as chief administrative officer and director of community and government relations for the city of Provo. He and I share many of the same conservative values and principles and his service as mayor is a strong reflection of his dedication to those ideals. Mayor Billings will long be remembered for focusing on effective public safety and law enforcement, fiscal responsibility, economic development and job creation, neighborhood and downtown revitalization, the arts, emergency readiness, and a host of other local, regional, and national public policy issues. During his tenure, Provo City has consistently received national recognition for low crime rates, high quality of life, and positive business development.

Mayor Billings has accomplished a great deal during his tenure as Mayor of Provo. His dedicated public service and determination to shape Provo into the wonderful city it is today will be remembered for years to come. I ask my colleagues to join me and the citizens of the great State of Utah in thanking Mayor Billings for his many years of dedicated service. We all appreciate his efforts and service, but none so more than me.

#### GUN OWNERS SUPPORT GUN SAFETY LAWS

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, the debate surrounding gun legislation is often an acrimonious one, creating the perception that Americans are hopelessly divided on this policy issue. After listening to the positions of the National Rifle Association, NRA, a person could

conclude that progress toward a national consensus on sensible gun legislation is a long way off. This perception, however, is just that: merely a perception. In reality, Americans of all political stripes share much common ground when it comes to issues of gun safety, and I am hopeful that this consensus will produce tangible legislative results.

In a recent poll conducted by well-known pollster Frank Luntz, NRA members and non-NRA gun owners expressed strong support for a number of proposed gun safety laws. These gun-owning Americans did not see a contradiction between supporting legislative efforts to reduce gun violence and their right to bear arms. Specifically, 85 percent of non-NRA gun owners and 69 percent of NRA gun owners supported closing the "gun show loophole" by requiring all gun sellers at gun shows to conduct a Brady criminal background check on prospective purchasers. In addition, 86 percent of non-NRA gun owners and 82 percent of NRA members favored a proposal to prevent individuals listed on a terrorist watch list from purchasing firearms. Seventy-four percent of non-NRA gun owners and 69 percent of NRA members also agreed with this statement: "the federal government should not restrict the police's ability to access, use, and share data that helps them enforce federal, state, and local gun laws."

At first glance, these polling numbers may not seem very surprising. After all, these gun safety proposals are founded on common sense and are crafted to keep firearms out of the hands of criminals and terrorists. Unfortunately though, the NRA leadership continues to oppose three Federal gun safety bills that, according to the recent poll, their own members support: the Gun Show Background Check Act, S. 843, which would close the "gun show loophole;" the Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act, S. 1317, which would prevent individuals listed on terrorist watch lists from purchasing a gun; and the Preserving Records of Terrorist and Criminal Transactions Act, S. 2820, which would improve the ability of law enforcement agencies to prevent gun violence by increasing the amount of time gun background check records are kept.

I support these sensible gun safety measures, and as the polling indicates, so do a majority of American gun owners, including NRA members. The NRA is not only out of touch with mainstream America, they also are out of touch with their own members. It is time to set aside the false claims that too often cloud the debate surrounding gun safety. There is an overwhelming consensus in America: the time to pass commonsense gun safety legislation is now.